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ADDRESS

OF

JAMES YOUNG, ESQ., M.P.P.

PRESIDENT OF THE

ASSOCIATION OF MECHANICS' INSTITUTES

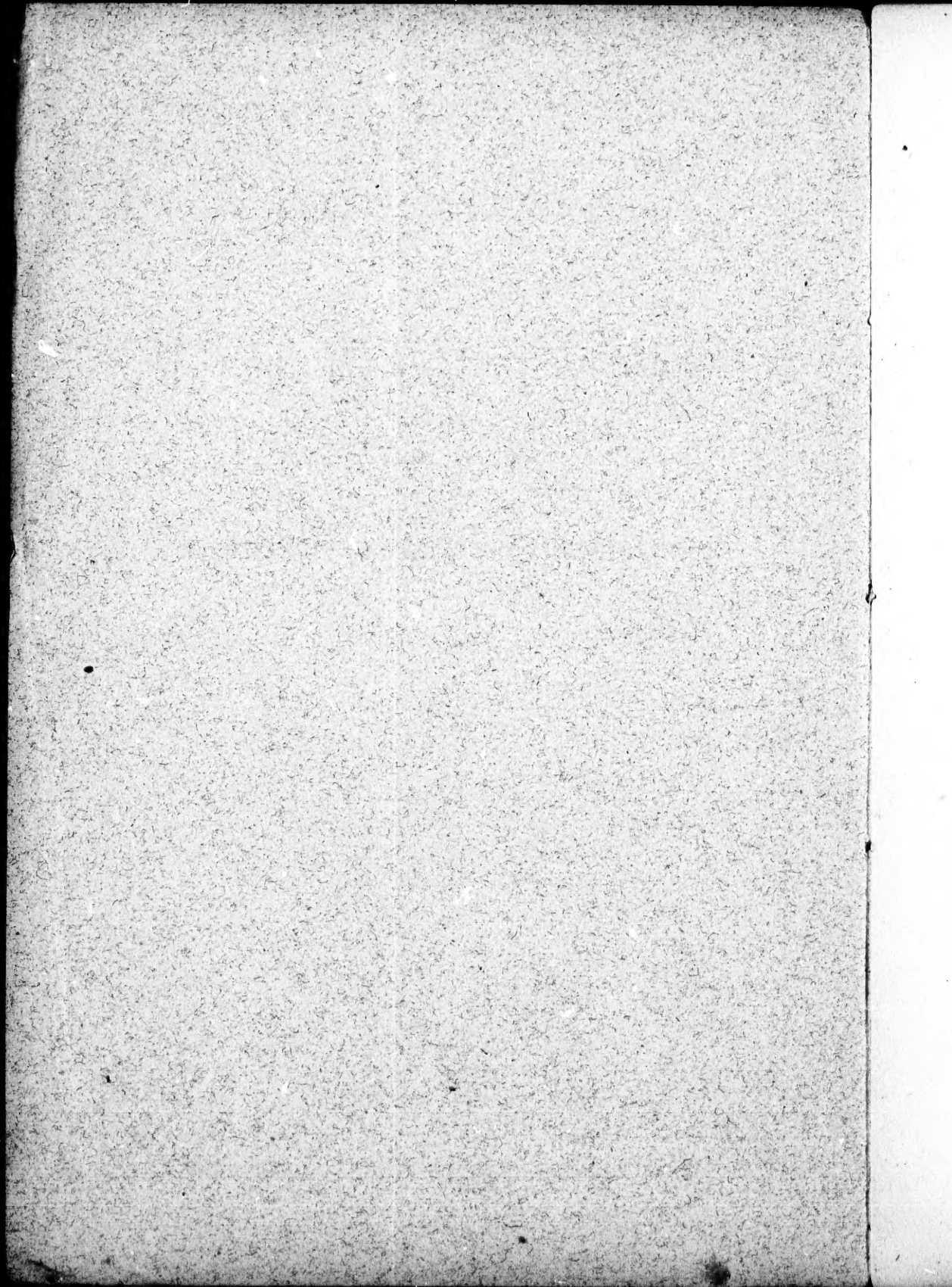
OF ONTARIO

READ AT THE ANNUAL MEETING AT HAMILTON, ON
THE 22ND SEPTEMBER, 1880.

TORONTO

GLOBE PRINTING COMPANY, 25 AND 28 KING STREET EAST,

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GENTLEMEN,—As I may be unable to return from Manitoba in time to attend the Annual Meeting of our Association, which is the first occasion on which I have been absent since its establishment in 1868, during ten years of which time I have had the honor to be your President, I take this means of making a few observations which it would have afforded me pleasure to make in person.

I regard the present as a somewhat important period in the history of the Mechanics' Institutes of the Province, and of this their Provincial Association. They have much increased in numbers and importance of late years, and there is promise of further increase in future; and how these useful bodies can be best managed; how the moderate grants received by them from the public chest can be best utilized for the public good; how their general efficiency can be improved—these and other similar questions are becoming increasingly important. Whilst every well-wisher will hail with satisfaction all suggestions for their further progress and improvement, I feel it to be my duty as your President to give a pointed denial to statements recently made, that our Mechanics' Institutes are proving failures, and uselessly expending the Legislative grant. I do not deny that there may be exceptions. Some Institutes may be badly managed, just as some Agricultural and Horticultural Societies, and even Governments, are sometimes badly managed. But I unhesitatingly assert that no similar societies possess a more intelligent and influential membership; that they are quite as efficiently conducted, to say the least of it, as our Agricultural and other societies receiving Legislative aid, and equally fulfil the objects for which they were called into existence.

As every Institute which receives a grant of public money must by law become a member of the Association of Mechanics' Institutes of Ontario, now in Annual Meeting assembled, the history of this Association is practically the history of the Mechanics' Institutes of the Province during the past decade. And I find, on looking over the official returns, not only evidences of expansion and increased efficiency on the part of Institutes, but of the usefulness of this Association in obtaining from

Parliament beneficial legislation, and in various other ways pointing out and promoting what is best for their welfare. The correctness of these statements will be seen by a few comparisons between the condition of the Institutes in 1868, the first year the Provincial Association went into operation, and the latest returns which are at hand at time of writing.

So little interest was manifested so recently as ten years ago, that the delegates sent by affiliated Institutes to our annual meetings did not number over twelve or fourteen. In 1872, at the Annual Meeting in Hamilton, the number rose to thirty-three, and has since ranged from that number up to nearly fifty. In 1868, only thirteen Institutes complied with the conditions necessary to obtain the Legislative grant, the aggregate amount of which only came to the very modest sum of \$1,610. In 1879 there were about one hundred Institutes in existence. Seventy-four of these were affiliated with this Association, and the amount of the grants for which they qualified was no less than \$22,885. It will be seen from these figures that during eleven years the number of affiliated Institutes increased nearly six, and the amount of the Legislative aid nearly fifteen times.

As the amount of local contributions, as we shall see presently, has largely exceeded that received from Parliament, the bare recital of these facts proves that our system of Mechanics' Institutes has not been unprogressive, nor lacking in local interest and liberality in its maintenance.

It may also be mentioned in this connection that the receipts of the Provincial Association during its first year, being almost exclusively then, as now, 5 per cent. of the Legislative grant, as provided by the Agricultural and Arts Act, were \$138, and its expenditure \$121, leaving a balance of \$17 on hand. For the year 1879-80 the net receipts were \$1,011.09, the expenditure, \$1,133.84, and the balance on hand at the close of the year, counting the previous surplus, was \$1,361.61.

By an official return in my possession, it appears the first Mechanics' Institute started in Ontario was that of Toronto in the year 1830, the next in Kingston in 1835, the third in Brantford in 1836; and among others organized at an early period, were those of Smith's Falls, Paris, Galt, Dundas and Simcoe. The origin and early history of these institutions is a tempting subject, but it would lead us too far from the matter in hand—the progress made by Mechanics' Institutes during the last decade. In 1868 the Libraries were but scantily supplied with books; there were but few Reading Rooms; and with the exception of

and Legislative grants given for one class of the community alone; and in the interest of these institutions, and even of the mechanical classes themselves, it is of the utmost importance, in consideration of the intelligent and consequently limited constituency in each community from which they can draw support, that our Mechanics' Institutes should continue to be open to all classes on terms of perfect equality.

Whilst vindicating this Association and the affiliated Institutes from the criticisms made upon them, I need scarcely say that every true friend will welcome every suggestion for their further progress and improvement. In one important respect I am free to admit I have been rather disappointed, considering the interest taken and encouragement given by the Provincial Association: that is, in the comparatively small number of Institutes which have established and carried on Evening Classes. Only about one out of every four have claimed the prizes annually offered by this Association. Toronto has been a notable exception in this respect, but in most of our towns and villages Evening Classes have either been neglected entirely or but poorly patronized. This is to be regretted, and it is to be hoped that the cause is to be found not so much in want of interest or attention on the part of the officers of the various Institutes, as from want of adequate means to secure proper teachers and rooms. The continued growth of manufactures throughout the Province renders it necessary that Evening Class instruction should be attainable by the Industrial classes during the winter months, more especially for subjects of a technological character. As your President, it became my duty to bring this matter before the Minister of Education, who took power in the Act passed last session to give special encouragement to Classes for instruction in Physical and Natural Science. It is to be hoped that an efficient system, which can be worked by and through our Mechanics' Institutes, may be inaugurated by the Education Department. But if this be found impracticable, I have no hesitation in saying, in view of the success of Schools of Art in Great Britain, France, Germany and other countries, that the Government must take up the question and establish such schools itself, if the industrial classes and industrial interests of Ontario are to keep step in progress and skill with the other manufacturing countries of the world.

The limits of an address are too narrow to dwell at length upon the chief elements which go to make a Mechanics' Institute efficient and successful. There are a few points only which I propose to glance at, and these I shall touch very briefly.

The first I would specify is, efficient officers, more especially an efficient Secretary. What is wanted is not eminent men, too busy or too

negligent to look near the Reading Room and Library except on the night of elections, but earnest, energetic men, who value the good the Institute is doing for themselves and others, and who take pleasure in increasing its membership and usefulness. Every Institute has a Library: care should be taken to have intelligent men upon the Library Committee—not gentlemen with particular *isms*, who will fill the shelves with Science, Theology, or any other specialty alone, but those possessing an intelligent knowledge of the whole field of Literature, and who will select works abreast of the spirit of the age. “Meritorious and popular” should, in general, be the motto of a Library Committee, for it is better, in my humble judgment, to purchase a book which will be carefully and extensively read, than a better but drier one which will be left on the shelves to moulder in the dust. Special attention should be given to keep up a good selection of the standard and modern works on the Mechanical Arts, without which no Institute can be considered properly equipped. There should be a Reading Room in connection with every Institute—in fact, without one the institution has hardly reached the chrysalis stage. Difficulties in the way of establishing Reading Rooms, which often seem like lions in the path, frequently disappear when faced by three or four earnest workers. Half a dozen daily and weekly newspapers, the leading British and American reviews, three or four illustrated journals—not forgetting the *London Illustrated News*, *Punch*, and our own inimitable *Grip*—together with the *Scientific American*, and a few other industrial papers, will suffice for a commencement; and with a clean, well-lighted and comfortable room, will almost certainly attract sufficient members to make the venture a success. Besides its own usefulness, the Reading Room brings the members more frequently together, interests them more in the wants and success of the Institute, and thus benefits the Library and all the other objects which the institution has in view. Among these should not be forgotten the subject of Evening Class instruction. This is a duty which every Institute, financially able, ought to faithfully discharge, so long as there are young mechanics or others in their community who are desirous or can be induced to attend; for it is one of the principal objects for which the Legislative grant is given, and one, too, of the very highest importance to those who were prevented in youth from receiving that education so necessary to their happiness and success in life.

There is another feature not absolutely necessary to make a successful Institute, but which adds to its attractions, especially to young men, and which can in most cases be made self-sustaining if not a source of revenue. I refer to a Conversation or Recreation Room. After the

toils of the day are over, one does not always care to read or study, and if there be attached to an Institute a well conducted Recreation Room, in which chess, checkers and other innocent games are permitted, many members are attracted thereby, and young men are frequently prevented from resorting to places which neither benefit health nor morals. The game of billiards has been successfully introduced by the Toronto Mechanics' Institute, and is now one of their chief sources of revenue. In all our towns and large villages these Recreation Rooms, if properly conducted, can be made remunerative to Institutes as well as feeders to the membership of the Library and Reading Rooms; and I would cordially recommend them to the consideration of the officers and members of the various Institutes throughout the country.

I fear I have already trespassed too much upon your patience, but with a few words in regard to the future, I shall have done. A few months ago the Minister of Education, under the powers granted to him by the statute, appointed Dr. S. P. May to visit the various Institutes and make a thorough inspection of their affairs.

The Legislative grants have heretofore been paid without very searching scrutiny, on the part of the Government, as to whether the conditions upon which they are offered had been strictly complied with. Under a lax system some abuses are apt to creep in; and so far as the mission of Dr. May may be intended to correct anything of this nature, and enforce the conditions attached to the Legislative aid, it is worthy of approval. But I hope, and may also express my belief, that there are no good grounds for the fears which have arisen among some of the Institutes, that radical changes are in contemplation, which will make them mere appendages of the Education Department, with greatly restricted liberty of action. Such a course would, in my opinion, be a grave mistake. There are no valid reasons why Mechanics' Institutes should be dealt with more strictly than our Agricultural and other societies aided by Parliament, and there should be no interference with their freedom of action except in so far as may be necessary to ensure that the public money is expended upon the objects for which it is granted. To place them in anything like a strait-jacket would be most unfortunate. They are bodies difficult to support and conduct. The chief portion of the labor and expense generally falls upon a few of the more intelligent and zealous members; and if, instead of being encouraged, these gentlemen found themselves unnecessarily hampered and interfered with by departments or officials, they would be very apt to throw the whole thing up in disgust. Under these circumstances, whilst approving of all proper

efforts to enforce the conditions attached to the Legislative grants, I am strongly of opinion it would be a grave mistake to make any radical changes in the character and powers of the affiliated Institutes or the Provincial Association, both of which, I submit, have greatly prospered, and have done, and are doing, good work for Ontario under the existing system.

It now only remains for me, gentlemen, to thank you, which I do most sincerely, for your kind consideration in electing me President of your Association for ten successive years ; and it will afford me pleasure if in any way, by advice or otherwise, I can assist whichever gentleman you may choose as my successor.



